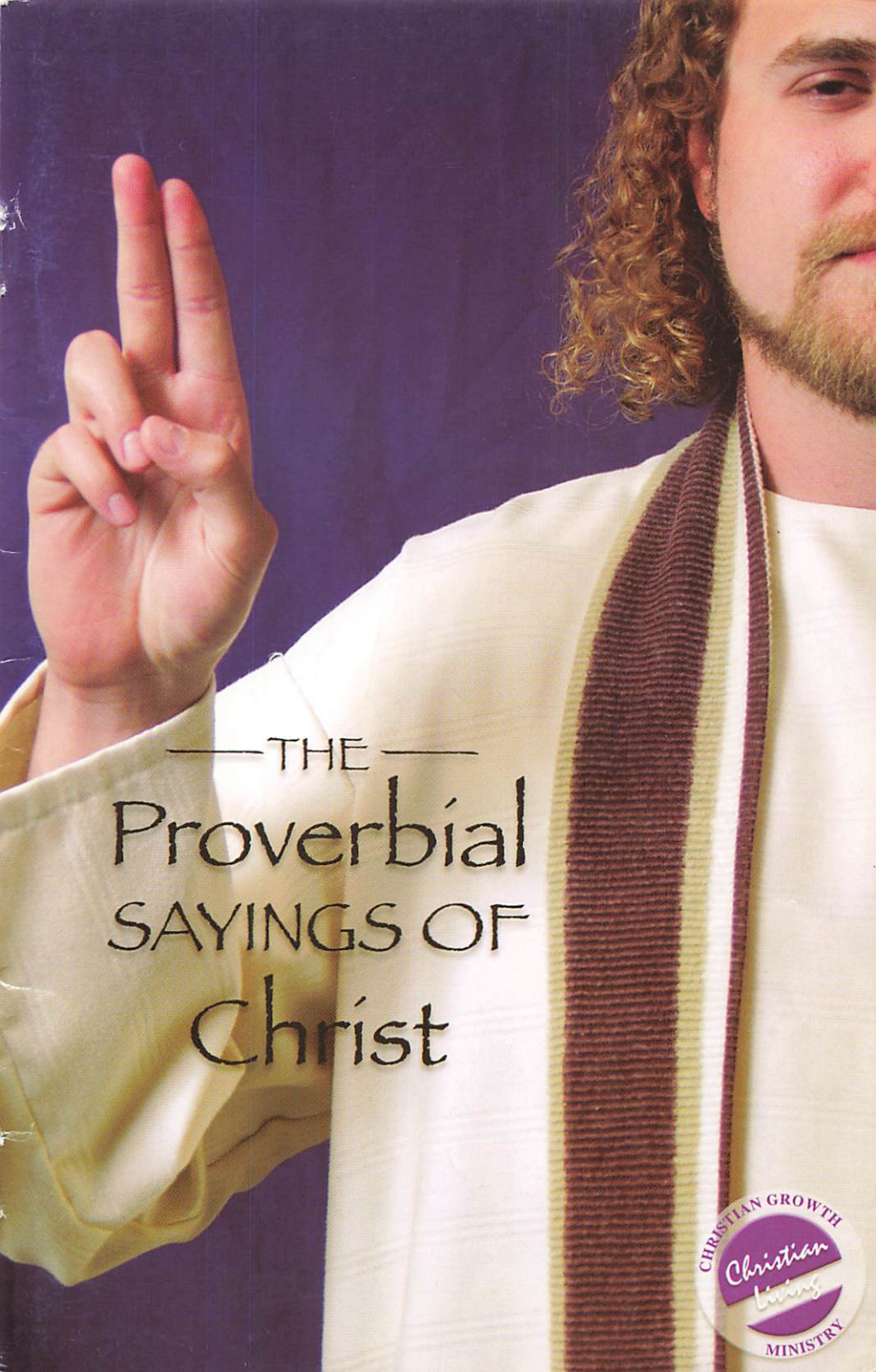
THE
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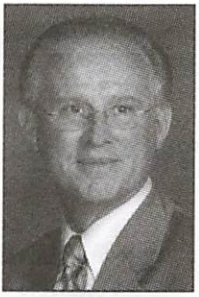
The Proverbial Sayings of Christ



Greg Medenwald
author

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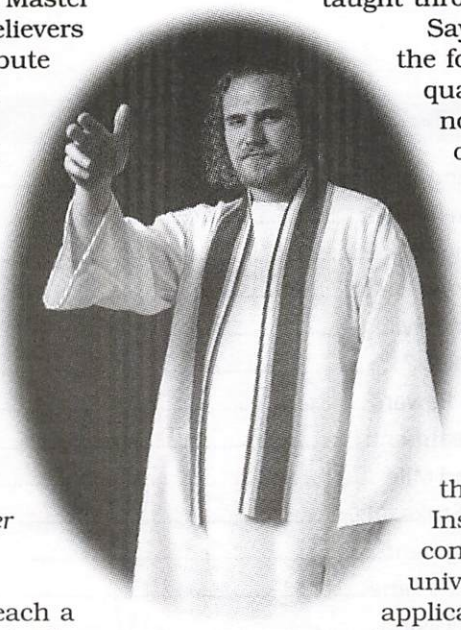
Introduction

The Master Teacher

Jesus is the Master Teacher. Believers gladly attribute that title to Him, and even the people who were not His immediate followers recognized that Jesus was a teacher of extraordinary character and ability as Nicodemus said, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God"* (John 3:2).



Jesus could teach a small group (the twelve apostles), or a large group (the 5000 of John 6). His motives in teaching were always selfless and pure, His techniques always timely and ethical, His contents always pertinent and true, and His credentials were beyond question. He taught in stories (parables) to illustrate truth. He taught in sermons to highlight and empower truth. He taught in lessons to elaborate on truth. And, to catch the attention of people and to aid in their ability to recall truth, Jesus also taught through sayings. Sayings! That is the focus of this quarter. We will not concentrate on the familiar statements of Christ which only a believer could appreciate, though a list of some of those sayings can be found on page 11 of this book. Instead, we will consider the universal (wide application), practical, proverbial (well-known), and quotable sayings of Christ which are found largely in the four Gospels. These sayings could easily be heard at home, church, work, school, or possibly at a ballgame or shopping center. Wherever people gather and show a sincere interest in good instructions for life could be the setting for relating one of these thirteen sayings. For no one could say it, and mean it, like Jesus!

Greg Medenwald, author

LESSON 1

More Than Bread

Matthew 4:4

People do not live by bread alone. That is the modern English equivalent of Jesus' saying recorded in Matthew 4:4, and it is a well-known and often used statement. It may even be misused. For example, an avid golfer might say to his wife, "Honey, man does not live by bread alone, I must go golfing!" And she might reply, "Honey, you are right, I must go shopping!"

There is nothing wrong with a reasonable amount of golfing or shopping, but Jesus had a higher use in mind when He spoke those now famous words. His concern was not golfing, shopping, or even eating physical food, but obediently living life to its fullest within the remarkable and rewarding will of God. *"Every word"* of God was important to Jesus because it prepared people to live abundantly in every area of life, and still does today. For God's Word is our primary source of information for life.

The Context of the Saying

Jesus exhibited a deep devotion to the Word of God during His three temptations which are recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. His love

The Heart of the Lesson

God's Word is our primary source of information for life. Hear this saying of Christ, and trust God to teach you the basic principles of life through His Word.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

for the written Word was evident as He defended Himself by quoting from Deuteronomy each time He was enticed by Satan. His defense in Matthew 4:4 was quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:7 was taken from Deuteronomy 6:16, and Matthew 4:10 from Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20.

The psalmist wrote, *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Psalm 119:11). Apparently Jesus was familiar with that verse and practiced it as He perfectly resisted Satan through the strength of God's Word.

The first temptation occurred when Jesus was extremely hungry. He had not eaten for *"forty days and forty nights"* (Matthew 4:2) when the devil came to Him with an evil plan. Just *"command that these stones be made bread"* (Matthew 4:3), he subtly suggested. Well Jesus was as fully human as He was fully God, and there is no doubt that food of any kind sounded good. But then Jesus would have played right into the hands of Satan. Had He created food for Himself, Jesus would have said that God led Him down the wrong path (Matthew 4:1), that God really did not love Him, that God was holding out on Him, and that God was incapable and/or unwilling to provide for Him in the right way and time.

Jesus, however, knew better, and He had the backing of God's Word to look Satan in the eye and to emphatically say no!

The Hebrews of the wilderness journey did not do as well as Jesus. They grew hungry during their trip and began to complain as a people without faith. They also expressed a desire to care for themselves as opposed to relying upon God. Therefore, God fed them with manna, which was sufficient to keep the journey going, and taught them some good lessons along the way.

God's purpose was to bless the Hebrews superabundantly (Deuteronomy 8:7-10). However, to enjoy the prosperity of the Promised Land, they first had to learn to be obedient and faithful. They had to learn that there was something more to life than food, human comforts, and luxuries. Food was important, but learning to live according to God's Word would cause the food to taste better and their lives to be lived to the fullest.

Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus quoted, is that story in summary. The Hebrews were soon to enter the Promised Land when Moses gave them this important reminder.

"He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Jesus learned that lesson quickly and perfectly as the Son of Man. It took the Hebrews forty years. The question now is how long will we

take to learn that people do not live by bread alone?

By the way, God has all the time in the world. We don't. The quicker we learn to depend upon the guidance of God in His Word, the better off we will be!

The Content of the Saying

Jesus *"was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15), and that was clearly true in Matthew 4:4. Any person who would have gone without food for that long would have been tempted. He would have weighed the benefits of siding with Satan, considered His hunger and His ability to turn stones into bread, and thought of possible ways to justify His wrong. Yet Jesus had the ability to flatly resist, and He did so because of a long-standing principle taught by God which was still in force. *"It is written"* said Jesus, and that settled the issue. He would not yield to Satan's will!

Jesus trusted God the Father over Satan. As long as He was in God's perfect will, as He was according to Matthew 4:1, Jesus believed that God would adequately supply His physical needs at the right time, and He also believed that there was something more to life than the next meal. To Jesus, feeding on God's Word and obeying His will was more important than dining on bread. The food was necessary at some point, but consuming God's Word was His first priority.

Jesus' body needed the nutriment bread offered, but His soul needed something more. He needed God's Word! Jesus considered the Word of God to be inerrant and adequate for every occasion of life *("every word")*, and to be inspired *("that proceedeth out of the mouth of God")*. Through the Word Jesus found guidance and fulfillment.

No one saw the value of God's Word better than Jesus, but He was not the only one. Jeremiah, for example, said, *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts"* (Jeremiah 15:16). Peter realized its spiritual nutritional value when he wrote *"as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby"* (1 Peter 2:2).

Now we must fall in line with Jesus, Jeremiah, and Peter! God's Word is still in force. It is still adequate for every need of the inner life, and it is still God's compass to the promised land of spiritual abundance. So take it in, and consume several portions daily. Enjoy it. Live by it. Realize that life is more than bread, and life will have greater potential while Satan will be less of a threat.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand,... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:13, 17).

The Bread of Life

John 6:35

Moses called the manna which fell from heaven *"the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat"* (Exodus 16:15). That *bread*, as indicated in lesson 1, sustained the lives of the children of Israel. Bread to them was life!

Bread was also important in John 6. Jesus, seeing that people were hungry and desperate for food, miraculously fed fish and bread to the people who had come to hear Him speak (John 6:1-21), and then He taught them His great lesson on the Bread of Life (John 6:22-59) which was highlighted by the following statement: *"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"* (John 6:35).

The *"bread"* about which Jesus spoke in John 6:35 sustains life. That is, what bread is to the physical life Jesus is to the spiritual and eternal life. A person who does not eat will not live physically; and a person who does not believe in Jesus as personal Savior will not live spiritually or eternally.

Therefore at the outset of this study do what Jesus has suggested in the statements *"cometh to me"* and *"believeth on me."* Then you will never *"hunger"* or *"thirst."* That is, you will have life, and your life will be full!

If you are already saved, please offer the truth of this page to someone else. Help them to get a square meal of *"the bread of life."*

LESSON 2

No Looking Back

Luke 9:62

Distractions abound, and no one seems to be totally exempt from their glamour and glitter. From the student needing to focus on studies to the homemaker needing to focus on duties, the employee needing to focus on work, and the athlete needing to focus on training, everyone at some point fights the battle of the divided mind, and Christians are no exception. That is why Jesus said *"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62).

When I read that universal saying of Christ, I immediately recall memories of my grandfather plowing his garden with his big work horse Champ in Provo, Arkansas, or my father-in-law plowing his soybean and cotton fields in southeast Missouri with a tractor large enough to cultivate eight rows at a time. If they wanted straight furrows, both men had to look forward and not be bothered by the sights and sounds to the left, right, or behind. To have done otherwise would have resulted in crooked furrows, being held in low esteem as farmers, and producing inferior crops.

Jesus was a carpenter by trade, and He apparently also knew about agriculture. However, His real passion was for people to have

The Heart of the Lesson

Christian discipleship requires a full commitment. Hear this saying of Christ and resolve to have a straightforward look toward Christ.
"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

a straightforward relationship with God, for people to be blessed, and for God to be glorified. Consequently Jesus did not hesitate to advance the idea of full commitment, and to ask potential followers to count the cost of discipleship. The benefit was well worth the cost; yet the cost was great, and Jesus knew that the three would-be disciples of Luke 9:57-62 were unwilling to pay the steep price.

Three Would-Be Disciples Who Looked Back

Three men met Jesus in Samaria, and without putting a great deal of forethought into it, promised Jesus in varying forms to *"follow thee whithersoever thou goest"* (Luke 9:57).

Their words had a nice ring and their intent may have even been honorable, but they were not fully committed, and Jesus was aware of it. The first man proved to be distracted by hardship (Luke 9:57-58), and the second two by kinship (Luke 9:59-61). They were willing to call Jesus *"Lord"* (Luke 9:57), but not to fully and truly obey Him. They did not realize that Jesus had *"steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem"* (Luke 9:51) to pay the heavy price of the crucifixion. And Jesus, understanding their shallow commitment, knew that they would be unwilling to pay the total price of discipleship which He had already identified in Luke 9:23. *"He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

The three would-be disciples started looking back even before the journey got underway. All three made excuses which were without merit, especially the one who wanted to wait to bury his father when his father was not even sick to the point of death (Luke 9:59).

Don't become a follower of Jesus simply for the glory of it, nor the benefit of it, nor even the good of it. Instead, follow Jesus because you love Him, because you deeply appreciate His many sufferings for you, and because you have a desire to repay Him in devotion, obedience, and service.

Others Who Looked Back

The Bible contains many stories of weak commitment. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, Lot's wife was told to *"Escape for thy life"* from the evil city of Sodom and to *"look not behind thee"* (Genesis 19:17). Yet Lot's wife, with her divided heart, *"looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt"* (Genesis 19:26).

What happened in Genesis happened all the way through to the Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Jesus said to the church of Ephesus *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Revelation 2:4), and to the church of Laodicea

He said this: *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth"* (Revelation 3:15-16).

Whether it related to an individual or church, God always showed displeasure with halfhearted devotion. Whether the story is found in the Old Testament or New, God has always been displeased with a lack of commitment. Whether it was Samson's shallow commitment during the period of the judges, or David's during the period of the kings, or Peter's during the period of the Jerusalem church, God was always let down with anything less than all out commitment. For there are no Bible stories that end well without serious devotion to God.

Distractions That Cause People to Look Back

As in the case of Luke 9, a person's focus on God can be diverted by hardship or kinship, and there are other reasons mentioned in the Bible as well. The list is not exhaustive, but here are some of the dangers about which God's people have been warned.

A person can be distracted by his own selfish desires and ambitions, and will be distracted as one desire or ambition builds on top of the other. In revealing the wisdom of God about this matter Solomon said, *"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways"* (Proverbs 14:14).

A person can be distracted by sin, which is called *"iniquity"* in Matthew 24:12. *"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."* Sin in some form or fashion is at the root of all distractions.

A person can be distracted by new religious ways according to Galatians 1:6. *"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel."* And a person can equally be distracted by old religious ways. He cannot be pulled down by genuine Christianity, but he can be distracted by old religious ways which were not right in the first place. That is the message of Galatians 4:9: *"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"*

A believer cannot yield to the left or right in relation to any one of these factors. Such a believer will not be fit for service in the work of God's kingdom, which is one reason why God gives the believer the power to resist temptation at all stations and levels of life. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;*

but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Warnings About Looking Back

Jesus gave one warning in Luke 9:62, and God gives another one through the writer to the Hebrews in 10:38: *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."*

Imagine being a child of God, but never pleasing God the Father. How sad! How unnatural! How dissatisfying! Yet it happens every time a Christian fails to hear the universal saying of Christ found in Luke 9:62, and resolving to have a straightforward look toward Christ.

Displeasing God is no pleasant thought, and it is truly an unrewarding path. The good news, however, is that the Great Physician can cure His people of the spiritual diseases of lukewarmness and backsliding, even the extreme cases.

Remember that you belong to Jesus. He died for you, the Holy Spirit has regenerated you, and you are one of the sheep of His fold. With that in mind, it is said that when hogs fall into a mud hole, that they enjoy it and want to wallow in it. But you are not a hog; you are a sheep. And it is said of sheep, when they fall into a mud hole, that they feel terribly uncomfortable and struggle to get out of it so that they can continue to follow their shepherd.

If you have fallen into a spiritual mud hole, get out of it! Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), will help you. That is why He has a staff! Then get a straightforward look toward Christ, follow Him, and He will make you *"fit for the kingdom of God."*

That is, as you follow Christ in total commitment on a day-by-day basis, Jesus will be able to use you in service to Him and to bring glory to God. Your life on earth will then have true meaning, and your future in heaven will be graciously rewarded.

So please, no looking back!

The Familiar Expressions of Christ

A *saying*, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is "a familiar expression." A saying can have a proverbial and universal quality such as the thirteen sayings considered in this study, or it can have a more narrow focus like the many sayings which Jesus specifically shared with His followers. Here is a sampling of some of those treasured familiar expressions that only a believer can fully appreciate.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

"All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

"They that are whole need not a physician: but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31).

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

LESSON 3

Places in Your Heart

Matthew 6:21

Jesus said something very unusual during the Sermon on the Mount. If people were not listening well, they might not have even caught it. It was something foreign to the world, contrary to human thinking, and most likely something that no one else thought to say. About midway through the sermon, in a segment in which He was teaching about money (Matthew 6:19-24), Jesus said, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Matthew 6:21).

What a statement! This proverbial, universal, and practical saying, which is also recorded in Luke 12:34, teaches us how to fix a place in our hearts in relation to money, materials, resources, and priorities. It is so simple that it might be ignored or disbelieved. Yet it works, and it works on the strength of our investments.

In Matthew 6:21 and its context Jesus, playing something like the role of a financial adviser, gave two points about wisely investing *"treasure."*

Treasure Invested in Heaven Lasts Forever

The Pharisees, a large and strict Jewish religious group that existed during the time of Christ on earth, firmly believed that God

The Heart of the Lesson

Investing your treasures in heaven will give you a heart for heaven. Hear this saying of Christ, and fix a place in your heart for heaven by investing your valuables there.

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

materially blessed all people He loved. They taught that those who were in God's favor would have many possessions, and those who were not in God's favor would have few possessions. Consequently, the Pharisees were intent on building up great wealth on earth, and sometimes they would stoop to low standards to get the job done.

So Jesus had a word especially for them and their philosophy during the sermon. First, He stated it negatively in Matthew 6:19: *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal."*

Then, He stated it positively in Matthew 6:20, 33, and implied that heavenly investments were the safest and surest of all. *"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt; and where thieves do not break through nor steal:... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

Did you catch that? Do not make earthly investments unrighteously like the Pharisees. Instead, unlike the Pharisees, make investments in heaven (verse 20) and in the righteousness of God (verse 33), and the things you truly need on earth will be given as well.

Jesus offers a win-win situation. A believer invests treasures in heaven where eternal dividends are paid, and also gains the full care and provision of God on earth. And additionally, the believer's mind is then turned toward heaven, the place of the principal investment. That is, the believer's heart becomes fixed on the blessings of heaven as opposed to the constant struggles of earth, and consequently is able to get the best out of both earthly and heavenly existence, all by the amazing grace of God.

And what Jesus said so perfectly in Matthew 6:19-21, Paul said similarly in Colossians 3:2: *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."*

Treasure Invested in Heaven Turns the Heart Toward Heaven

The word *treasure* in Matthew 6:21 and the plural word *treasures* in Matthew 6:19-20 refer to more than just dollars and cents, stocks and bonds, and fine jewelry. Money and the things it buys are included, but so are other valuables such as our thoughts, time, energy, efforts, emotions, prayers, and talents.

Where are those treasures invested? Everyone has them, and everyone must do something with them. Well Jesus, in His infinite yet practical wisdom, said that our heart will be fixed on whatever or wherever our valuables are placed. That is, a passion will be kindled in direct relationship to our investments.

We sometimes read Matthew 6:21 just the opposite: "For where my

heart is, there I will place my treasure." And consequently we say things like "I no longer have a heart for Jesus," or "I no longer look forward to going to heaven," or "I no longer care about the church," or "I no longer have a passion for ministry," or "I no longer love my spouse"; and as a result, "I am going to withdraw my money, thoughts, time, energy, emotions, prayers, and talents from that person or place."

Jesus would counsel us to do otherwise! For example, to the young man who might say, "I no longer love my wife," Jesus would encourage him to start directing or redirecting his valuable resources toward her, knowing that the love would be rekindled and would grow even stronger. That is contrary to contemporary philosophy, yet it is one of the laws of life as God has fixed it. It works! It applies universally to earthly matters such as relationships and jobs, and also to heavenly matters, which is why Jesus said, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Matthew 6:21).

What and where are your priorities? Do you focus too much on getting rich, and too little on being righteous? Do you worry more about earthly matters than rejoicing over heavenly matters? Are your passions godly or devilish? Are your relationships with people selfless or selfish? Are you fulfilling your promises or breaking your promises? And most importantly, are you making earthly investments or heavenly investments?

No one can answer all these questions perfectly. We all have temptations, and regretfully we all have failures. That is why Jesus has given us the counsel of Matthew 6:21, which is a wake-up call to making good investments. And why? Because a lifetime of poor investments can in no way result in good, and there are no exceptions.

Therefore, be careful to wisely invest all the valuables God has given you in the people, places, and priorities that are most important, and place the best of your investments in God and eternity.

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

LESSON 4

God-Given Privilege

Luke 12:48

"To whom much playing time is given, much is required." Those were the words of the former University of Southern Mississippi girl's basketball coach, which he spoke during a late-night sports interview on our local television station. I listened with interest to his words as they related to the USM girl's basketball team, but what really caught my attention was that he quoted Christ about spiritual matters, and related the principle to his basketball team. He was referring to his starting players. If they wanted quality playing time, then they had to produce both offensively and defensively. That seemed reasonable to me, and I was satisfied with both his coaching philosophy and the fact that he had quoted a form of a universal saying of Christ. He was a Christian, and he was simply taking this teaching of Christ and applying it to everyday life.

Accountability was evidently important to the basketball coach, and it was also important to Christ about the weightier matters of eternity as He said, *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required"* (Luke 12:48).

Jesus spoke those words as a summary and high point of His parable of the faithful servant and evil servant that is recorded in Luke

The Heart of the Lesson

Accountability is an important matter to God. Hear this saying of Christ, and become a faithful Christian steward.

"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48).

12:42-48. If a believer, according to this teaching of Christ, knows that Christ is coming again and does nothing to prepare himself and others for the second advent, then Jesus will hold him especially responsible at the judgment seat. Still he will be a servant, but a less rewarded servant.

So accountability was of deep consequence to Christ, as well as issues of responsibility, dedication, and stewardship. Those were the godly principles Jesus had in mind as He shared in Judea the parable recorded in Luke 12, and also the parable found in Luke 19:11-27, which He spoke days later in Jericho on His last journey to Jerusalem.

Both of those stories are worth reading, and will set the foundation for this study about accounting for our knowledge, words, belongings, abilities, and in all matters of life.

Accountability for Knowledge

Jesus said, *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). Jesus used the word *truth* to refer to the truth about Himself, and also to the truth He taught. Falsehood enslaves, while truth sets an obedient believer free from the clutches and consequences of sin and causes life to be fuller and more rewarding.

Therefore knowing the truth is a wonderful privilege, and every believer, as the apostle Peter (Luke 12:41), should strive to know as much truth as possible. However with the privilege of knowing truth comes responsibility, and that is the primary point Jesus was making when He said, *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required"* (Luke 12:48).

To hear the truth and disbelieve it is characteristic of lost people. Jesus addressed those persons in John 3:19 when He said, *"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."* Those people, unless they come to the light of knowledge and accept Jesus as their personal Savior, are regretfully and eternally doomed.

To know the truth and disobey it through acts of commission and omission, however, is characteristic of a backslidden believer who will one day answer to Christ for those spiritual failures. Jesus had that person in mind when He spoke Luke 12:48, as did His half-brother James in James 4:17: *"To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is a sin."*

It is a sin because it is a blatant act against God. It is equivalent to ignoring God, to telling God you know a better way, or to rebellion against God. It is wrong. It is a poor act of stewardship, and it is just the reverse of what God wants to do in our lives by making us wonderfully free (John 8:32).

Accountability for Words

The words spoken by Jesus in Matthew 12:36 were directed primarily to the Pharisees who were accusing Him of being in partnership with Satan (Matthew 12:24). They were reckless with their words of hate, and Jesus did not hesitate to draw it to their attention. Here is what He said: *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."*

Possibly that caused some of the Pharisees to stop and think before they spoke, and it should do the same for contemporary believers.

An idle word is a useless word. It is an untrue word spoken in deception. It is an ill-willed word such as slander or gossip. It is a mistimed word which is not spoken decently or in order. And it is a word which God hears and does not consider to be a harmless and insignificant slip of the tongue for those indiscreet words reveal the true nature of the individual's heart. *"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"* (Matthew 12:23).

To pray, "Father, give me the right words, timing, and spirit," before speaking in a critical situation is a wise thing to do. For God will ultimately hold us responsible for what we say.

Accountability for Belongings, Opportunities, and Abilities

In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) as well as in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus stressed accountability for one's belongings, opportunities, and abilities.

Those two texts are lengthy, and the spiritual significance and explanation of each story are deep. However by reading Luke 19:15, a person can easily see that God will expect all believers to be answerable at the return of Christ for the resources given in this life. *"It came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."*

Accountability in All Matters of Life

"*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*" (Romans 14:12).

That verse settles the issue. God will call all believers, with no exceptions, to be comprehensively accountable. At the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10), God the Son will review the lives of His

followers, evaluate their service, and judge and reward them accordingly.

Paul clearly was writing to believers (Romans 1:7), and the immediate concern was that of judging fellow Christians (Romans 14:1-10). Yet by the time he wrote verse 12 the idea was total accountability. That was his point to the believers of Rome and to the believers of Corinth as well. *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire"* (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Be ready, therefore, to answer for the wonderful privileges God has graciously given you, and follow His directions in being a good steward of your life and resources.

LESSON 5

For or Against

Luke 11:23

There comes a point in a person's life when a decision must be made about Christ. Each person must choose to believe Christ or to disbelieve Christ. Those who choose to believe Christ must then choose on a daily basis to obey Christ or to disobey Christ. Thousands of other choices will also be offered along the way. Many of them will be small decisions pertaining to what to eat and wear, and many will be large decisions about education, marriage, vocation, and family. No decision is more urgent and important, however, than a decision about Christ. And consequently, that choice requires one to be very decisive. That is what Jesus had in mind when He said, *"He that is not with me is against me"* (Luke 11:23).

The sayings of Christ often conclude or summarize His more detailed teachings, and Luke 11:23 is one such case. In the context of Luke 11:14-23 Jesus answered an accusation about casting out demons by the power of Satan (verses 14-15). The accusation, of course, was ill-willed (verse 16) and also illogical since it did not make sense for Satan to help Jesus in casting out demons (verses 17-19).

To the accusers in Luke 11, who were some of the religious leaders of the day, Jesus made a clear and firm point. The point was that if

The Heart of the Lesson

There is no neutrality in the spiritual and eternal matters of God. Hear this saying of Christ, and make a definite decision to join the side of God.

"He that is not with me is against me" (Luke 11:23).

the religious leaders were not actively for Him, then they were actively against Him. And there was also a word to the disciples in Luke 11:23. If they were going to be an idle and impartial audience simply standing by to observe the battle between Jesus and the religious leaders, then they too were actively against Him, for they could not passively straddle the fence about Christ and matters of His eternal kingdom. They had to be proactively on one side or the other, and so do we!

Neutrality Is a Disgusting Sin to Christ

Indecision about some matters may be comical. I read a bumper sticker that said "Indecision may or may not be my problem," and another one read "I used to be indecisive, but now I'm not so sure." A sign on a boss' desk read, "My decision is maybe... and that's final!"

So indecision can be funny, but not about the eternal issues of Christ. He sees neutrality as disgusting. Notice this sampling of verses from the middle portion of Luke's Gospel alone.

"Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50).

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Luke 11:23).

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

Jesus drew a line in the sand in each of those three verses. Just to avoid opposing Him was not enough. Making no choice at all was choosing against Him, and making a weak choice was doing the same. People were either out to help His cause or hurt His cause, and there was no middle ground. Neutrality was not an option for His followers, because neutrality was not an option for Jesus. He gave His all upon the cross at Calvary, and He rightfully expected His disciples to do the same, and He still does today.

Jesus was not alone in this way of thinking. His half-brother James, for example, took up his older brother's banner when he said, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

So with both Jesus and James it was all or nothing!

A number of months ago a political candidate announced that he was a Christian and that when he was campaigning in the South he was going to talk about being a Christian, which meant that he was not going to mention his Christianity in the North, East, or West. That did not make sense! If a person is truly a Christian, he will speak

about Christ wherever he goes and to whomever he speaks. He will not be perfect, yet he will earnestly seek to advance the cause of Christ and not be ashamed to fly the colors of Christianity in his comments and conduct, for anything less would be displeasing to Christ.

Neutrality Is at Some Point Costly

A humorous story is told about a man who lived in a border state during the Civil War. He did not want to fight for the North or the South during the war, so he wore a Confederate Army jacket and Union Army pants. Yet he still got into trouble. The Union soldiers shot at his jacket, and the Confederates shot at his pants. He thought it was a win-win situation, but it was lose-lose instead.

A person might conveniently decide for Christ at one moment, and for the world at the next moment, thinking he will have the best of both worlds. But it does not work that way. In the long run he will lose. Sooner or later he is going to fall off the fence he has been straddling, and great will be the fall, as Jesus gave no hope to His opposing forces in Luke 11.

It is far better to make a definite decision to join the side of God. (This was also noted in lesson 2.) There will be difficulties and sacrifices in making such a choice, but the blessings will far outweigh the burdens, and you will be able to rejoice in verses like Romans 8:31: *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"*

LESSON 6

Humility's Reward

Luke 14:11

No one likes a smart aleck, or so I have heard it said. Apparently that obnoxious, arrogant, and prideful spirit that causes the smart aleck to push others backward and to assert himself is distasteful to everyone. It certainly was to Christ, and that is why He had something to say about it. His statement was kinder and gentler than the one above, but still Christ got right to the point in Luke 14:11 as He was speaking to some self-righteous Pharisees. *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*

That was not the first or last time that Jesus spoke on the issue of pride versus humility. In the previous chapter He said: *"Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last"* (Luke 13:30), and in the parable of the pharisee and publican the words of Jesus in Luke 18:14 are almost identical to Luke 14:11. So Jesus had no shortage of sayings for the high and mighty ones of His day.

What is so very sad is that Jesus also had to address this issue with His followers. They too were subject to arrogantly asserting themselves above one another, and that brought on the occasion

The Heart of the Lesson

The person who willingly serves others will be exalted by God. Hear this saying of Christ, and seek to be like Him in humility.
"Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

which is recorded in Luke 22:24-26. *"There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

So everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, needs an occasional reminder about the sin of pride and the quality of humility.

Humility Is the Character of Christ

The Pharisees of Luke 14 thought they deserved the highest positions. They were hungry for power and desperately wanted to keep people under their control, even stooping to unethical means to accomplish their selfish ends.

Diametrically opposed to them was Christ. He taught humility during the Sermon on the Mount: *"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5). He practiced humility by washing the feet of the disciples (John 13:5). He suffered in humility upon the cross (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:8), and in humility He invited everyone to come to Him. *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

It is not always easy or enjoyable to be humble, as Jesus indicated by the words *"Take my yoke upon you."* Yet it is always right, and it meets with good results as Jesus said, *"Ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

The Pharisees were out to use people for their selfish ambitions; Jesus was out to bless people with rest through humility, and He left no one out of the invitation. He did not proudly select a few from the highest class of people, but He humbly invited everyone to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-29).

Seek to be like Christ in character, and you will grow in humility.

Humility Is Possible for All Believers

Peter became humble. Through dependence upon Christ he learned humility. His story in the four Gospels indicates that it was not easy. Yet in time and by relying upon the resurrected Savior he developed the Christian quality of humility and went on to write about it in verses such as 1 Peter 5:5: *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."*

If God helped Peter in his brashness to become humble, He can help you to become humble. And if God gave you the direction to become humble in 1 Peter 5:5, and in many other verses as well, He will enable you to become humble. Let it happen! Realize the facts about yourself: you know very little of all that there is to know, you achieve very little of all that there is to achieve, and the world will go on without you when you are gone. As one person said, "Get over yourself," and let Jesus work humility in you just as He did in His disciple Peter. It can happen!

Humility Is Wise

In addition to God resisting the proud and giving grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5), it is wise to be humble to keep from totally embarrassing yourself on some infamous occasion. A prideful blunder is what Solomon, the wisest man of his time, had in mind in Proverbs 25:6-7: *"Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen."*

Sooner or later pride will cause a person to stumble and fall, and the fall will be embarrassing. And possibly there will be no one there to help the fallen up because, as someone said, "He who sings his own praises is always a soloist."

Humility Is Rewarded

"*For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*" (Luke 14:11).

Luke 14:11 is not a gimmick that guarantees a promotion. Instead, it is a sincere and serious saying of Christ that is to be taken in all earnestness. If you seek honor, it will not truly happen. But if you earn honor the right way and wait for God and people to give it to you, it will happen. Therefore, trust God to do His part in your promotion, and do your part by practicing humility as Christ taught in Luke 14:10: *"When thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee."*

LESSON 7

Mutual Treatment

Luke 6:31

Luke 6:31 is Jesus' version of the Golden Rule, which He spoke during the Sermon on the Mount, and it is also probably the best known of His universal sayings. *"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

Matthew also recorded the statement, only in slightly different words. *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 7:12).

From Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12 has come the modern English version which is well known throughout the English speaking world: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

That rule defines the quality of humanity. It is not always practiced, but it has always been appreciated, as I remember well back to my elementary school days when local banks would give students a six- or twelve-inch ruler with the Golden Rule proudly engraved on the front.

Those days have sadly disappeared, but the Golden Rule, which is based squarely upon the teachings of Christ, lives on in God's Word and hopefully in the attitudes and actions of His people.

The Heart of the Lesson

God intends for people to treat one another with mutual respect. Hear this saying of Christ, and treat others as you would want to be treated. *"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise"* (Luke 6:31).

Read the Golden Rule carefully, and you will see that it adds a dimension of quality and mental health to life. It first assumes that we want the absolute best for ourselves, and then it urges us to treat others exactly like we want to be treated. Breaking the rule even a little bit is disallowed by the word *likewise*, which is the last word of Luke 6:31.

Reportedly the Golden Rule, unlike some of the other universal sayings of Christ, did not originate with Jesus, nor was it exclusive to Him. For example, Hillel, a Jewish rabbi, said "What is hateful to you, do not to another." Philo, a highly respected Jewish man from Alexandria, said, "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else." Confucius, a Chinese philosopher, stated, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not to others."

Jesus, however, was the only teacher to speak the rule in a positive and proactive form. As best as I can tell, everyone else stated it negatively, and only Jesus gave this rule in the positive slant: *"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

The Way We Treat Others Matters to God

The way we treat others is important to God according to the text (Luke 6:31) and context (Luke 6:27-36). In this portion of the sermon Jesus clearly taught His followers to treat one another with mutual respect, and He held them to the highest of standards rather than the lowest. Notice what he preached in Luke 6:27-36, and read His words slowly with an open mind and heart.

"I say unto you which hear, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

You have just read what may be the most difficult text in the Bible to apply, and a text that would be impossible to apply without receiving, understanding, and appreciating the mercy of God. As Jesus

stated in verse 36 of the reading, we do not deserve God's mercy, but He gives it to us anyway; and He does so because He loves us. The major point is that what we have freely received we must freely give!

It is correct that people do not always deserve our mercy and kindness, but we give it to them anyway as the children and representatives of God on earth because that is what we have received from Him. Doing anything less than the Golden Rule, which is also the sum total of the teachings of Moses on how to treat others (Matthew 7:12), would be a travesty of God's love, mercy, and justice.

The Way We Treat Others Affects our Prayers

You have already read Matthew 7:12, but have you noticed its context? In Matthew 7 the Golden Rule follows immediately after the teaching of Christ on prayer (Matthew 7:7-11), as the two subjects are interconnected.

Imagine a child being terribly mean to his sibling while, at the same time, asking his parents for a big favor. The parents would surely reject the request, and tell their child to be nice to his brother or sister instead. Why would they do a special favor for their child, when the child was totally unwilling to do a favor for his sibling?

Well that is somewhat like the position we put God in when we pray so sweetly and gently for ourselves, yet we treat others with stern disrespect and maybe even hatred. That is not right, and it is truly a hindrance to our prayer life. If we want God to treat us favorably by answering our prayers, we must treat others with respect.

The Way We Treat Others Impacts Every Area of our Lives

I read about a study done not long ago on a college campus. An instructor asked his students to write down the initials of all the people they disliked. Some of the students could only think of one or two people they disliked, while others quickly and easily listed the initials of a number of fellow students. And, in evaluating his research, the instructor discovered that the students who disliked the largest number of people were themselves the most widely disliked. That is amazing, and it shows the truth of the Golden Rule and how deeply it impacts our lives.

You can yell the loudest, and get the attention of people. You can stand the tallest, and get the attention of people. You can be the meanest, and get the attention of people. You can manipulate the most, and get the attention of people. You can buy expensive favors,

and get the attention of people. You can lie, and get the attention of people. Or, you can simply and consistently treat people the way you would prefer to be treated, and get the best and purest attention of all. And if you cannot get the attention, job, promotion, or friendship the right way through the love, ethics, and honesty of the Golden Rule, it is not worth having in the first place. That is the *rule* of the Golden Rule!

Instead of practicing the perverted form of the Golden Rule that is occasionally spoken of as a joke, "Do unto others before they do unto you," try the Golden Rule of Christ. Try it as you have been taught by Christ, and as He practiced it Himself. Try it because God has been extremely merciful to you and treated you kindly when you did not deserve it. Try it because kindness is always the best policy. Try it and see if the better things in life do not eventually come your way. You can take a detour around the Golden Rule and get to some people, promotions, and places quicker, but you will find in the end that those people, promotions, and places were not what you needed. Everyone and everything you really need is obtainable at the right time by practicing mutual respect, or Jesus would not have said *"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

LESSON 8

The Second Mile

Matthew 5:41

Life calls all people to duty, and when called you have two distinct options. Number one, you can do the bare minimum and even do it with resentment, bitterness, or hatred. Or number two, you can do better than expected and thereby be a blessing to people and a witness for God. It was the second option that Jesus preached during the Sermon of the Mount: *"Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain"* (Matthew 5:41).

An employer might ask an employee to go the second mile. That is, to give extra effort in action and gracious effort in attitude. A teacher might ask a student to go the second mile. A coach might ask a player to go the second mile. A director might ask an actor to go the second mile. A parent might ask a child to go the second mile. And this is for certain, God asks all of us to go the second mile, because He understands that that is best for the individual and for the economy and future of life. It may not, in all aspects, be the contemporary and popular American way of life, but God sees it as the universal solution to having everyone gainfully employed in worthwhile endeavors. Think how much quality would be added to life for everyone if everyone practiced the rule of the second mile.

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus taught us to give extra effort, and to do better than people expect. Hear this saying of Christ, and give your best effort in all that you do. *"Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain"* (Matthew 5:41).

Do not Strike Back When You are Called to Duty

The second mile saying of Christ is found in the heart of His teaching about retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42), and it needs to be studied and understood in that setting.

The Romans could, by law and at their discretion, force the citizens of Jesus' day into limited service. It was almost like the draft or paying taxes to the occupiers. The Roman soldiers and officials could compel the people of Israel to carry their baggage, gear, or armor for one mile. They could also force them to supply food and water, to feed their horses, and to guide them to particular destinations. It could happen without warning at any given moment on any given day, as it did for Simon of Cyrene in carrying the cross of Christ. *"As they* [the soldiers of the Roman governor Pilate, Matthew 27:27, and Jesus who had been stripped, beaten and spat upon, Matthew 27:28-31] *came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross"* (Matthew 27:32).

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He knew that He would be terribly mistreated by the Romans. Yet He did not want His actions and attitudes to be formed and controlled by them and their wrong. He wanted to be directed by a higher power. He wanted to do what was right in spite of the wrong of others. He wanted to live on a higher level and not to be dominated by a constant need to retaliate. So His way was to give extra effort and to do significantly better than people expected. That was His practice, and also what He preached through the saying *"Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."*

Do Go the Second Mile When You are Called to Duty

Giving extra effort as a gracious representative and witness of Christ is the key thought of the second mile rule. That's lifestyle evangelism and Christian economics at their best. It is also one way to practice Jesus' earlier teaching in the Sermon on the Mount to be *"the salt of the earth"* (Matthew 5:13) and *"the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:14). Just as the Roman soldiers represented the Emperor of Rome, the Christians who first heard this saying represented the King of kings Who was and is very gracious. Every action and attitude of the soldiers said something about Caesar, and every action and attitude of the believers said something about Christ. So graciously going the second mile was important.

Trusting God while traveling the second mile is also important. You are under no obligation to do something that is clearly contrary to

God's Word or will (Acts 4:19), and you have to turn all the *what-ifs* over to God and trust Him that the duty to which you are called will not be excessive, exhaustive, or occur too often. Simply trust God to make it right in the end, which is exactly what Jesus did! Notice especially the last clause in 1 Peter 2:23: *"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."*

Jesus' philosophy was that it is better, in the long run, to suffer than to cause suffering. He said that so perfectly and precisely in the second mile saying. And what Jesus said in one sentence, Paul enlarged upon as he wrote to believers who were living in the capital city of the Roman Empire. *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:17-21).

The application is universal. In every area of life you can do the bare minimum or better than expected. If you give extra effort and go beyond what the average person would do, it will not always be appreciated by people. It will not always result in immediate praise or a bonus, raise, or promotion. Yet it will always be recognized and rewarded by God, even if that reward must wait until the future. So go ahead and give your best effort in all that you do knowing that the One Who has called you to duty will be honored and that you will be protected and appropriately compensated by Him.

LESSON 9

Coiled to Strike

Matthew 5:39

Ending a long-standing feud, as we have learned from the proverbial stories of the Hatfields and McCoys, is no easy task. Yet Jesus had the perfect solution! His suggestion was to never let the feud get started in the first place, and He said it like this: *"Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"* (Matthew 5:39).

This saying of Christ, which also has a universal quality and application, is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. It is close in content to lesson 8 (Matthew 5:41), and is associated with the *Lex Talionis*, which is the Old Testament law of retaliation or, as we would know it better, the eye-for-an-eye teaching. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"* (Matthew 5:38-39).

The *Lex Talionis* (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-22; Deuteronomy 19:21) was a mercy law that did not allow people to take the law into their own hands. It limited vengeance, not allowing it to go beyond the offense or to become excessive.

Yet Jesus had a better idea, which is indicated by the use of the

The Heart of the Lesson

Vengeance is not the way of Christ or Christianity. Hear this saying of Christ, and leave vengeance in the hands of God.
"Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39).

contrasting word *but* and appears twice in Matthew 5:39. His turning the other cheek theory was a significantly better way to end a feud or to deal with a personal insult.

This teaching, which applies to personal insults and injuries and not to nations and their larger threats, does not portray the typical habits of modern-day people. We are more prone to be coiled like rattlesnakes ready to strike defensively at the least personal threat, and even Christians fit far too frequently into that category. Therefore, through this study may God help us to uncoil and to be more like Christ in leaving vengeance in the hands of God.

Don't Be a Coward!

Jesus is not suggesting in Matthew 5:39 that His followers should be spineless cowards. Absolutely not. The teaching says nothing about running away, and to turn the other cheek actually necessitates standing your ground. God has not given His people *"the spirit of fear"* (2 Timothy 1:7), which also relates to our dealings with people, and Jesus certainly stood His ground as He appeared before the high priest in John 18:19-23 and asked the Roman soldier, *"Why smitest thou me?"* (verse 23).

Do Be a Christian!

Jesus is not teaching believers to be fainthearted by His saying, but He is clearly advocating that we replace an Old Testament law with a new godly attitude about the offenses, abuses, and injustices which are bound to happen in this sinful and imperfect world inhabited by over six billion imperfect people.

First, Jesus is teaching us to have an attitude of humility (lesson 6) and selflessness, as far too often we take ourselves too seriously in this life.

Second, Jesus is teaching us to have an attitude more characteristic of a spiritually regenerated person, a follower of Christ, a child of God, and a witness for God. He does not want us to act and react in the same old ways of the carnal person, but in the exciting and brilliant new ways of the new creature. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things* (including the ways we respond to personal insults and injuries) *"are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Third, Jesus is teaching us to have an attitude that does not so vigorously demand personal rights, nor fails to remember that earth is not heaven where our eternal and principal rewards and citizenship lie. *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment; worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Fourth, and this goes right to the heart of the teaching of Matthew 5:39, Jesus wants His followers to have an attitude that is far too busy with God's spiritual work to be distracted by an insult or injury that will mean nothing in eternity.

For a baseball player to hit a home run and round all the bases he cannot be distracted by all the boos coming from the stands. He will have to ignore those insults and keep his eye squarely on the ball and his base running, or he will surely strike out and fail. Nor can a Christian continue the work of worship, evangelism, Christian education, and ministry at full speed on a full scale while constantly distracted by all the insults and injuries that come from the world. A believer who is deeply hurt by every ill word and misdeed experienced in this life will be unfit to do the work Christ has commissioned. And, if one is always acting out of vengeance, a beliver cannot at the same time be acting for Christ. An attitude of vengeance would definitely cause a Christian to lose focus, be disqualified, and be useless in some respects in the work of God's kingdom.

So uncoil yourself. Don't take issue with every unkind word a person says about you or to you. Consider every injury in the light of better things and times to come in heaven. Remember 2 Corinthians 4:17. Protect your capacity to serve God to the best of your God-given ability by ignoring offenses. Realize that the person who abuses you might desperately need to see your Christian witness and may be saved because of your witness. And, though it will not be easy, remember that vengeance belongs only to God. *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"* (Romans 12:19).

The next time your Christian commitment calls on you to turn the other cheek, think in terms of turning away from the face of the abuser toward the face of God and quote Romans 8:31 to yourself: *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"*

LESSON 10

Harsh Judgment

Matthew 7:1

Matthew 7:1 is probably the most misunderstood and misused of the universal sayings of Christ. Some people see it as a license to be whatever they want to be, to do whatever they want to do, and to say whatever they want to say without any consideration for what others might think or how they might be affected. It can even be misquoted as a snappy retort, such as, "Don't you dare judge me!"

Divine permission to sin was not what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 7:1. Neither did He prohibit all forms of judgment. In Matthew 7:6, for example, Jesus taught His followers to make moral distinctions as they relate to people. *"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."*

Paul also taught believers to be discerning in church discipline (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2), and John mentioned the need for discernment in relation to false teachers in 1 John 4:1: *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."*

Discernment, which is necessary for all of the above verses, is a

The Heart of the Lesson

Jesus teaches His followers to be quick in judging themselves, and slow in judging others. Hear this saying of Christ, and don't let judging others become your nature.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1).

form of judgment. The word *discerning*, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, means "showing insight and judgment; perceptive." So when Jesus said during the Sermon on the Mount, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged,"* He was not teaching believers to totally ignore the beliefs and behavior of other people.

On the other hand, judging others is not a spiritual gift, and God has appointed no believer to that specialized ministry. God has given no one permission to be whatever he wishes to be, and equally has bestowed upon no one an unlimited license to judge others. Jesus condemned harsh judgment that delights in finding fault with others. He is opposed to that aggressive, critical, censorious, and condemning spirit that is contrary to the Golden Rule. No one likes being judged, and consequently no one should take joy and satisfaction in purposefully focusing on the wrongs of other people.

Judging Yourself

Be quick to judge yourself! That is the teaching of Christ in Matthew 7:1-5, the high point of which is verse 5: *"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."*

The first principle of judgment advanced by Jesus is that we should begin with ourselves, and the second is that we should be as severe with ourselves as we are with others. Try hard! It will not be easy, and you will definitely need God's help to be consistently faithful to the teaching. As Thomas Kempis wrote, "Do not be angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be."

Judging Others

Be slow to judge others. That is the teaching of Christ in Matthew 7:1. *"Judge not, that ye be not judged."*

The English language takes the word *critic* from the Greek word translated *judge* (*krinete*) in Matthew 7:1. Let a person become hyper critical about everyone and everything, and God will take that into consideration at the critic's final judgment. If a person constantly and judgmentally sets the standard high for others, God will rightly set the standard high for that person (Matthew 7:1-2) who will simply reap what has been sown. It will not cause a believer to lose his salvation, but it will definitely have a negative effect on eternal rewards. Therefore, if you do not want *"what measure ye mete"* to be *"measured to you again"* (Matthew 7:2), you better be slow to judge others!

The Son of Man had deep insight to another angle about judging others. Unjust criticism and harsh judgment hurts, and it hurts

deeply! Jesus knew that by experience since He was, at the time, being unfairly judged by the Pharisees, and He simply did not want other people to needlessly feel that extreme pain. Jesus was merciful and compassionate in that way.

The apostle Paul agreed with Jesus about the issue of judging others and did not hesitate to mention it in his writings, often using strong language. Here, for example, are some selected Scriptures just from his letter to the Romans.

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (2:1).

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand" (14:4).

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (14:13).

Believers are taught not to judge others because we do not know all the facts. Christ does (John 2:24; 16:30; 21:17). We also have real difficulty in being impartial about ourselves, loved ones, and friends. Christ does not (Romans 2:11; James 2:9). We are also not morally good enough to judge others. Christ is (1 Corinthians 4:5). And we also have no ownership over the people we judge. Christ does (1 Corinthians 6:20), and consequently we should leave the judging to Him. Even God the Father has committed all judgment to Christ (John 5:22), so you know that we can and should to the same!

Do not become judgmental. Do not let judging others become a quick habit or your second nature. You have more important work to do than standing over people in judgment, and you cannot be hyper critical and give your best to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) at the same time.

Ask yourself "Who am I to judge?" before judging others, just as James taught in James 4:12: *"Who art thou that judgest another?"* Ask, "Is it my responsibility?," "Am I qualified?," "Will Christ be glorified and His cause advanced by this judgment?," and "Am I looking for someone to judge just to make me feel better about myself and because I enjoy it?"

Then you will be better prepared to be quick in judging yourself, and slow in judging others.

LESSON 11

One Day at a Time

Matthew 6:34

"Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere." "Worry is interest paid on trouble before it is due." "Worry can cast a big shadow behind a small thing." "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength." "Worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's trouble." "Worry is putting question marks where God has put periods." "Worry is a small trickle of fear that meanders through the mind until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained." "Worry is carrying a burden God never intended us to bear." "Worriers spend a lot of time shoveling smoke." "Don't worry about tomorrow. Remember, God is already there."

Because there is no shortage of worries and worriers in the carnal world, there is equally no shortage of sayings about worry. They abound! Yet there is one saying about worry that is above all others. Because of its Speaker, setting, and spirit it is the greatest saying of all. It is the saying of Christ about high anxiety and needless fear which is recorded in Matthew 6:34: *"Take therefore no thought for the*

The Heart of the Lesson

Worry is contrary to trusting God to meet our daily needs. Hear this saying of Christ, and trust God to care for you today and tomorrow as well.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Matthew 6:34).

morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

The proverbial, universal, practical, and quotable saying of Christ in Matthew 6:34 is the high point of the teachings of Christ about worry during the Sermon on the Mount. The word *therefore* connects the saying with its context (Matthew 6:25-34), and the three appearances of the expression *"take no thought"* (verses 25, 31, 34) leave no doubt that the topic is worry.

Today

Jesus teaches His followers to live one day at a time, trusting God to meet the needs of that particular day.

Now that is not a statement against planning, working, and saving. The birds Jesus mentioned in Matthew 6:25 do not worry about planting and harvesting for storage purposes, but they do get up early each and every morning to begin a diligent search for food for themselves and their hatchlings. That takes real effort, and an industrious and responsible spirit as well.

The Bible is pro work, and anti laziness. Although God's Word cautions against anxious worry, neither does it recommend stumbling through life without direction and a plan. Take these two verses written by the apostle Paul for example. *"Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not your's, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children"* (2 Corinthians 12:14). *"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Timothy 5:8).

Neither of these verses require anxious thought, but both require forethought. The application also necessitates concern, creative thinking, and hard work, and a lack of any of these qualities will, in fact, position a person to worry. The moral, therefore, is to work hard so that we will not tempt ourselves with worry.

Coupled with forethought and work, however, must be a huge amount of trust! The first two will not work to peak efficiency without the latter. We have to trust God to meet our needs on a daily basis, and that is why Jesus said *"take no thought,"* which is the equivalent of saying "do not worry."

Have you ever noticed that it is easier to say "do not worry," than to actually quit worrying? A person might wholeheartedly agree with the need to stop worrying, but feels helpless to do otherwise. Why is that?

Jesus gave two answers to that question in the context. First, our values and priorities have to be right or, once again, we will position ourselves to be tempted to worry. That is what materialism and *"all these things"* (The expression appears three times in Matthew 6:32-

33.) will do to a person, and why Jesus spoke what He did in Matthew 6:33: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

Seek the wrong things for the wrong reasons, and we will definitely be more apt to worry. Second, our faith has to be right, or we will, by human nature, build additional reasons in our minds to worry. Jesus made this point in Matthew 6:30: *"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"*

So faith is the key. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him"* (Hebrews 11:6), and that brings up the question "How do we grow in faith?" If faith is that important to overcoming worry, then we need to seek God's help in building faith.

First, give faith a chance by getting your priorities right. Go back to Matthew 6:33 and study that essential verse. Materialism and immorality are cold-blooded faith killers.

Second, join the fellowship of faith. Keep company with people who consistently trust God about the matters of daily life, and you will find their influence to be encouraging and empowering. Faith, to a degree, is contagious.

Third, pray for faith. Pray like the father who was seeking help for his son who was sick because of an evil spirit. He said to Jesus, *"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"* (Mark 9:24). The apostles on another occasion prayed *"Lord, increase our faith"* (Luke 17:5).

Fourth, study God's Word. Worry can be a daily habit; so make Bible study a daily habit — a counterattack of sorts. Why? Because *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). Also, commit some good faith verses to memory (Romans 14:23; Galatians 5:16; Hebrews 11:1, 39; 1 John 5:4), some good worry verses (Psalm 127:2; Luke 10:41; 21:34; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7), and some good verses about the love and power of God (Deuteronomy 7:8; Psalm 146:8; John 3:16; 16:27; 1 John 3:1; Romans 16:25).

Fifth, be patient with yourself. Do not quit the first time you stumble and fall back into the pit of worry. Instead, go back to the routine God wants you to maintain. Get your priorities right, fellowship with people of faith, pray for faith, study faith verses (especially verses about the love and power of God), be patient with yourself over the course of time, and you will gradually conquer the sin of worry. God will help you; that is His promise according to 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"There hath no temptation taken you* [including worry] *but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."*

Tomorrow

Matthew 6:34 is partly about today and partly about tomorrow. *"The morrow"* is mentioned twice in the verse.

Tomorrow, by its mere mention, is important, but it too is not to be an object or source of worry. Tomorrow has not even arrived. We do not truly know what it holds, and speculation about the future is often incorrect. So do not waste today worrying about tomorrow. You have only so many hours, energies, and opportunities in any given day, and it is a shame to spend those precious resources on a perceived trouble that may never materialize. That serves only to weaken our present abilities and opportunities. And most important to remember, the same all-powerful and loving God Who cares for His people today, will surely be present tomorrow. The old saying is true: we do not know what the future holds, but we do know Who holds the future. So trust Him with tomorrow!

What if tomorrow does not arrive? What if we die in an accident, or in our sleep? Then, as believers, we will be in heaven, and that is the best news of all. In that respect, tomorrow always looks bright for believers!

Yesterday

It is said that we often crucify ourselves between two thieves: one is worry about tomorrow, and the other is regret about yesterday. Do not let that happen. Do not give Satan that victory. We cannot change the past, but we can ruin a perfectly good day by worrying about the past. Instead, make things right with people as much as possible, sincerely repent of past sins (1 John 1:8-10), make a firm commitment to live for Christ today, and trust God to meet the needs of the day. He will! That is the promise of Matthew 6:34.

LESSON 12

The Joy of Giving

Acts 20:35

Have you heard the saying "Give until it hurts"? What a catchy saying! I like it, and many pastors would say *amen* to it, thinking that giving until it hurts would increase the church's offerings, work force, and effectiveness in ministry.

There may be a problem, however, with giving until it hurts. It may be, at least in some respects, impossible. Why? Because of a famous saying which is uniquely attributed to Christ in Acts 20:35. You have probably heard it quoted many times; it goes like this: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

The joy of giving overshadows the hurt of giving, according to this universal saying of Christ. A person, therefore, could conceivably give his last dime or ounce of energy or minute or emotion or talent, and never feel any pain in giving. Sharing is just that natural for the person who takes his nature from God, and it is why the life response statement of this lesson encourages the reader to enter into the joy of giving by sharing.

This saying of Christ found in Acts 20:35 was part of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders in Miletus (Acts 20:17). Paul was reminding them of his unselfish ministry and explaining why he was more

The Heart of the Lesson

Christ taught His followers to share. Hear this saying of Christ, and enter into the joy of giving by sharing your life.
"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

apt to give than receive. It was not wrong for the apostle Paul and other ministers to receive for the sake of continuing their ministries (1 Corinthians 9); he just enjoyed giving better.

The saying of Acts 20:35 is not found in the four Gospels, as the Bible admittedly did not record all the words and deeds of Jesus (John 21:25). Most likely the saying was passed down by oral tradition. It is, however, inspired, and it is similar in teaching to Christ's words found in Luke 6:38: *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."*

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" is a statement against greed and selfishness, and for sharing and selflessness. The emphasis is more on the gracious act of sharing than the mechanical act of giving such things as money and gifts, though sharing often involves money and gifts. It focuses first on the giving of yourself, which is the highest form of giving, and the giving which Paul applauded in 2 Corinthians 8:5: *"This they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."*

The Supreme Example of Giving

Jesus practiced what He preached as He excelled in matters of giving. He knew by experience that it was *"more blessed to give than to receive,"* and consequently He gave graciously, lovingly, fully, and sacrificially according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9: *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."*

Jesus willingly gave up the highest form of being rich in heaven, to take on the lowest form of poverty on earth to make a way for sinners to become saints through faith and make them spiritually and eternally rich. The successive words for Jesus in 2 Corinthians 8:9 are *rich*, *poor*, and *poverty*; the word for believers is *rich*. What a huge difference! That truly is grace in giving. It is unquestionably the supreme example of giving oneself, and it is the style and depth of giving that believers imitate, yet never perfectly duplicate in order to experience the joy of giving.

The Joy of Giving

Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive,"* and He gave His absolute all in both life and death. Paul then gave in obedience to the saying of Christ and found that it really was more blessed to give than to receive. That is why he gave this personal testimony about working and sharing in Acts 20:35: *"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to*

remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul had little desire for the material and comfortable things of life. He did, however, want to live life to its fullest and especially to know the deep joy of serving Christ (Acts 20:24). He appreciated Christ for giving His all (Acts 20:28), and consequently, to the best of his ability as a human being with limitations he too was willing to live sacrificially. Therefore, Paul was careful to avoid all acts and semblance of greed and coveting (Acts 20:33), and he worked honestly and diligently to provide for himself and others. *"Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me"* (Acts 20:34).

Did you catch the act of sharing in the words *"and to them that were with me"*? On some occasions, due to the goodness of God's people in various churches, Paul received. On other occasions, because he was neither greedy nor lazy, Paul worked for his necessities. On all occasions, however, Paul apparently shared. He took that lesson from Jesus! He was careful to support the weak (Acts 20:35), and he taught other believers to do likewise. *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves"* (Romans 15:1). *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth"* (Ephesians 4:28).

For all of this Paul felt blessed, and he was blessed! Paul was fully satisfied in life, not because of favorable circumstances, but because sharing for the glory of Christ and after His pattern was just that rewarding. Paul was happy, not due to good luck, but due to following in the gracious footsteps of Jesus, the greatest giver of all.

The Way of Giving

The apostle Paul quoted Jesus on giving in Acts 20:35 and taught believers how to give in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Here, briefly stated, are some of the high points.

Give voluntarily, sharing yourself and your substance: *"For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves"* (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Give proportionally, knowing that God is aware of your super abundance or your lack of abundance: *"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not"* (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Give mutually, realizing that there are times to give and get: *"But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your*

want: that there may be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:14).

Give generously, allowing God's maximum blessings to fall upon you: *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully"* (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Give cheerfully, enabling God to bless you in return: *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Give confidently, trusting God to care for you: *"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Give gratefully, knowing that you will never be able to out give God: *"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift"* (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Giving as an act of sharing is fundamental for the child of God. It is natural for him because God has given so graciously to him, because he has taken on the nature of God, and God has simply made His new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17) a living, walking, and talking giver rather than taker. God gave and taught His children to give. Jesus gave and taught His followers to give in Acts 20:35. Paul gave and taught His fellow believers to give in texts such as 2 Corinthians 8-9. So now it is time for contemporary believers to stand up and give. Share! Enter into the joy of giving by sharing your life.

LESSON 13

A Change of Fortune

Matthew 19:30

God's ways are not always our ways. For example, we customarily see the first as being first, and the last as being last. That is the way the typical human being thinks, and often times that is right. But not always! There are exceptions to the rule, and one of them is found in Matthew 19.

Jesus, while on His last journey to Jerusalem, stopped in Perea to witness to a rich young ruler. Though the individual was lost and totally unprepared for eternity, he apparently had the physical things necessary to make his life comfortable on earth. People probably thought of him as being first in many respects. Peter and his fellow apostles, on the other hand, had very little of what the world had to offer. They had *"forsaken all"* to follow Jesus, and Peter had that sinking feeling of being last when he said to Jesus *"what shall we have therefore?"* (Matthew 19:27).

After seeing the power and possessions of the rich young ruler, Peter was on the verge of feeling sorry for himself. Jesus, therefore, patiently and graciously encouraged the apostles with His wise counsel in Matthew 19:28-29, and then He gave them a saying they could always remember. This was not the apostles' first experience of being

The Heart of the Lesson

God is absolutely fair in relation to judging people. Hear this saying of Christ, and trust God that all people will reap what they sow.
"Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matthew 19:30).

without the world's goods, nor would it be their last. However, from this point on, they could recall these special words of Jesus: *"But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first"* (Matthew 19:30).

Jesus assured His followers that one day there would be a dramatic change of fortune. The young ruler who trusted in himself and his riches would be last, and those who accepted Christ and sacrificed for Him in service would be first.

View Life From God's Perspective

It is not always easy to do, but the believer who earnestly seeks to see life on earth from God's point of view can do so through consistently relying upon God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As you pray and apply God's truth and guidance to times of physical abundance, as well as to times of physical need, God will enable you to see the matters of earth in their proper perspective. Remember that life on earth as it is known today is temporary at best. Then you will also see the spiritual and eternal blessings of heaven to be far more important than the physical and temporary things of earth, and in doing so will position yourself to be a far greater servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will become the faithful disciple that Jesus wanted Peter to become in Matthew 19:27-30.

See Sacrifices as Investments

Instant gratification seems to be the rule of the day. We order a hamburger at a restaurant and expect to receive it within seconds. By telephone or the Internet we order from a catalog, and expect the item to be shipped overnight. We work, and then wait impatiently for the pay check to be electronically credited to our banking account, and we can even carelessly attempt to impose our hurried pace upon God, even to the point of resentment if we do not receive instant gratification for serving Him.

Slow down! God's ways are not always our ways, and God's timing is not always our timing. God may choose to do something rather quickly, and then He may choose, in His infinite wisdom, to take His time. That is the case in Matthew 19:28-29. Notice how Jesus encouraged His disciples to *follow* and *forsake* now, and to *judge* and *receive* later: *"Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."*

The sacrifices God's people make in serving Him can be seen as investments. Some of the dividends will be paid in this life; most of the dividends will be paid in the next life. And the greatest dividend of all, of course, will simply be the eternal satisfaction of serving Him!

Serve God for the Right Reasons, and Wait in Faith for the Judgment

Someone said, "He who bears the cross will wear the crown," and someone else said, "He who shares Christ's warfare will share Christ's triumph."

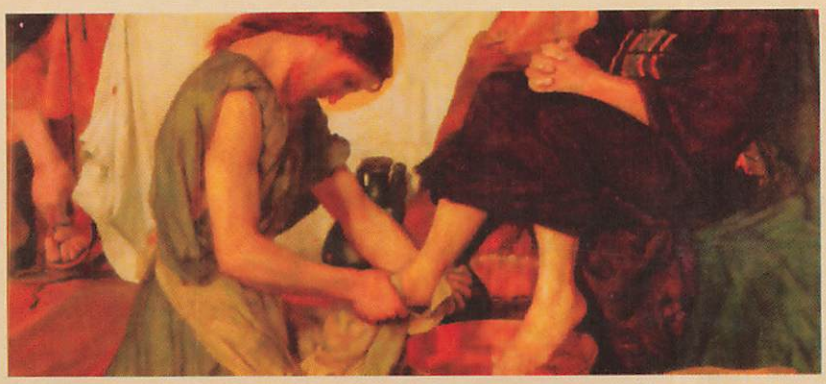
In eternity God will correct the injustices of our time on earth, and He will be generous and gracious to His people far beyond what is deserved. Therefore, for now we must serve God for the right reasons, not expecting a reward or insisting on knowing what we will receive, and wait in faith for the judgment that will cause the first to be last and the last to be first.

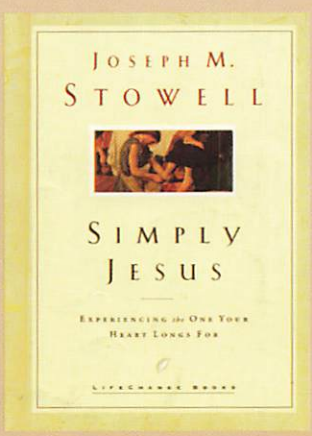
Trust God to Be Fair and Gracious in His Judgments

The rich young ruler, to whom God was exceedingly gracious in trying to save, was first in his selfish life without God on earth; so he will be last in eternity (Matthew 19:16-22). Lazarus was last in his selfless life with God on earth; so he will be first in eternity (Luke 16:19-25). God has been and will be fair to both of them, as He will be fair and gracious to all people. That is one of His absolute rules, as illustrated in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), and as stated by the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:7: *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."*

So hear the saying of Christ recorded in Matthew 19:30, and trust God to be abundantly fair and gracious to you in eternity. And in the meanwhile, love and serve Him today!

Who is your model?





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